



Students, faculty and staff presented President-elect Constance "Connie" Ledoux Book with numerous gifts at an event welcoming her to campus Oct. 9.

CAROLINE BREHMAN | PHOTO EDITOR

STAFF EDITORIAL

Elon's ninth president faces challenges in new role

HOW WE SEE IT

Constance "Connie" Ledoux Book, Elon's newest president, faces many challenges as she prepares for her new position

On Oct. 9, Elon University announced its newest President, Constance "Connie" Ledoux Book, who will be the university's first female president. This announcement came after a closed eight-monthlong search that left many Elon community members wanting more information.

Book is undoubtedly very qualified for this job — her experiences in her varying roles at Elon and at her previous institution, The Citadel, show her commitment to and passion for higher education. Many students, faculty and staff members who knew or worked with her during her time here at Elon showed excitement for her return.

Book seems perfectly suited for this role, but that does not mean this transition won't be difficult. While she is coming into this role with 16 years of experience at Elon serving in a number of different positions, this new position will certainly present her with multiple hurdles.

Elon News Network previously reported on the Presidential Search Committee's decision to keep the search closed. By doing

this, the search committee kept feedback from the community out of the entire process.

Though the committee did host town hall meetings where students and community members were able to voice what they wanted in the university's next president, the Elon community was unable to vet the candidates or meet them themselves before the decision was made. This made many community members feel excluded from the search. Book now must regain the trust from the public that was lost during this secretive and restricted search.

In addition, Book must reacquaint herself to a campus that is constantly evolving. Though Book left Elon just a few short years ago, the physical campus and its students change significantly year after year.

Book is also faced with the challenge of filling the shoes of a man who was beloved on this campus for 18 years, President Leo Lambert. Under Lambert's impressive leadership, Elon has grown in size, infrastructure and credibility across the nation. Not only has Lambert made incredible strides in growing this university, but he also became a central part of Elon culture.

But, most importantly, Book is tasked with the challenge of unifying a divided campus against

the backdrop of a divided nation. In recent months, the divisions among community members — especially surrounding ideas on diversity and inclusivity — have become more stark. Our campus is now at a crossroad: we can either continue down this path of division, or we can celebrate and overcome our differences by coming together and unifying as an institution.

In the spring of 2017, it seemed like each week there was a different act of racism on campus — from wearing racially insensitive costumes to parties, to disrespecting a historically black fraternity's plot, to a white student even using the N-word against a black student. These incidents have sparked important conversations on racial inequality and inclusion on our campus, but students remain divided.

In a 2014 survey by the Presidential Task Force on Black Student, Faculty and Staff experiences, 78.7 percent of black students polled said they felt unsafe on campus. In contrast, many non-black students see inclusivity on campus. Forty-one percent of non-Black students polled said they feel Elon is a positive, accepting community.

Book is also no stranger to dealing with issues of racism on college campuses. In January 2016, Book handled a situation where students at The Citadel dressed in white hoods that resembled members of the Klu Klux Klan. This experience shows Book's ability to address difficult situations and support minority students.

When Elon News Network

asked students last spring what characteristics they hoped to find in the university's newest president, many shared hopes for a diverse candidate, or one who was dedicated to supporting diversity initiatives. It is clear that diversity and inclusivity will be a major focus in the first few months of Book's

presidency, and we are hopeful that her fresh perspective will bring new, creative solutions to the issue.

Though her new position comes with many challenges, Book is well equipped for the job and will bring a new outlook to the many issues Elon's campus faces. These next few months as Book transitions into the presidency may be difficult, but this new chapter in Elon's history leaves room for unprecedented growth.

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